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ABSTRACT

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is a new approach to gathering information about collegiate quality on a national basis. The survey asks students to rate their level of participation in a variety of activities that have been shown to relate to academic and personal development. Other parts of the survey asks students to disclose the amount of reading and writing they do and the mental activities in which they are often engaged. Students are also asked about the extent to which college contributed to their growth in various areas. A total of 1,000 freshmen and seniors from Boise State responded to the survey, which included 15,910 students from 276 institutions. Boise State students were more likely to live off campus, work and care for children, transfer to the university, and be older than students at many colleges in the survey. The greatest amount of time spent in any activity was working off campus, with preparing for class second, and relaxing a distant third for seniors. The study identified differences in how freshmen and seniors generally spent their time, but, in general, their responses in this area were similar to those of students nationally. Seniors generally thought that the university had contributed to their growth more than did freshmen. Boise State students tended to rate the university lower than national averages for institutional support and relationships, and Boise State had lower scores than average on five benchmarks of institutional engagement. Findings identify areas in which Boise State should consider providing more student support. (SLD)

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Research Reports

Institutional Assessment
Boise State University

The National Survey of Student Engagement: Results from Boise State Freshmen and Seniors

Research Report 2000 - 04
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Coordinator , Office of Institutional Assessment

Boise State University
December 2000

The National Survey of Student Engagement: Results from Boise State Freshmen and Seniors

*"What counts most in terms of desired outcomes of college is what students **do** during college, not who they are or even where they go to college. That is, the voluminous research on college student development shows that the time and energy students devote to educationally purposeful activities is the single best predictor of their learning and personal development. (George Kuh, 2000)*

Overview

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is a new approach to gathering information about collegiate quality on a national basis. Unlike other approaches, the NSSE "is specifically designed to assess the extent to which students are engaged in empirically–derived good educational practices and what they gain from their college experiences" (Kuh, 2000). Cosponsored by The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and The Pew Forum for Undergraduate Learning and supported by a grant from the Pew Charitable Trusts, the survey asks students to rate their level of participation in a variety of activities which have been shown to relate to academic and personal development (e.g., making a class presentation, working with a faculty member on a research project) along with the number of hours spent on tasks such as preparing for class, working for pay, and providing care for dependents. Other parts of the survey ask students to disclose the amount of reading and writing they do and the mental activities they typically engage in (e.g., memorization, analysis, synthesis). In addition, the survey asks students about the extent to which the college contributed to their growth in a variety of areas, opinions about their school, relationships with others, and an overall evaluation of their educational experience.

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The survey's authors hope that the survey will provide a variety of useful information and generate an "occasion to re-frame both local and national conversations about collegiate quality" that move beyond *US News and World Report* rankings and other limited measures of quality. The purpose of this report is to provide the results to the Boise State community. Organizing questions include:

- What do our students have to tell us about their experiences?
- In what areas do our freshmen and seniors differ from others nationally, especially those at Masters I and II institutions, who answered the survey?
- How do our freshmen and seniors differ from one another? In particular, do seniors report greater growth in a variety of outcomes areas compared to freshmen?

Methodology

Boise State University was one of 276 four-year colleges and universities who elected to participate in the first large-scale administration of the survey. A total of 151,910 randomly selected students were surveyed, which included 1000 freshmen and seniors from Boise State. The overall response rate for Boise State University was 45%, which was slightly higher than the 42% response rate for Master's Universities and College and for all NSSE Institutions.

Sampling, surveying, and analysis was undertaken by NSSE staff. Results were then returned to the institutions, along with a disk containing raw data. Results included significance tests and effect sizes that made item by item comparisons between Boise State and both Masters' I and II institutions and all institutions. As recommended by NSSE staff, particular attention was paid to effect sizes that exceeded 0.5; where differences are noted between BSU and national data, the effect size always exceeds 0.5. Differences between BSU freshmen and seniors were tested using an independent groups t-test and a significance level of $P \leq .05$.

A copy of the survey can be found in Appendix A. A means summary report that includes effect sizes is in Appendix B, while Appendix C contains frequency distributions for the items. Readers who are interested in other information, including reliability and validity information, are urged to contact the author of this report.

Findings Based on Responses to Individual Items

Characteristics of Students who Responded to the Survey

It is no news that Boise State students are more likely to reside off-campus, work and care for children, transfer to the university, and be older than students attending many other colleges across the country. This was confirmed again in this study. Though comparing Boise State students to respondents from Master's Universities and Colleges was the best option available from several possible institutional types, the more metropolitan nature of the BSU campus was still evident in the demographic comparisons to other Masters' institutions. This fact should be recalled when making comparisons throughout the report.

In particular, Boise State students were less likely than students at other Master's Level I and II institutions to be female (64% vs. 70%), full-time (73% vs. 82%), and to reside on campus (12% vs. 34%). Boise State students were more likely to be white than were all students from Masters' I and II institutions (89% vs. 75%). About 65% of BSU freshmen were 19 or younger compared to 82% of all Master's level students. About half of BSU seniors were under the age of 30 compared to 76% of master's level seniors. While 95% of our freshmen began college at BSU compared to 90% of master's level freshmen, only 45% of seniors said they began college at Boise State compared to 52% of all master's level seniors.

How Students Spent Their Time

The greatest amount of time in any given week was spent on working off-campus, both freshmen and seniors reported. Freshmen spent the second greatest amount of time on two activities: preparing for class and relaxing/socializing. Seniors clearly placed preparing for class as second in terms of their time allotment while relaxing was a more distant third. The least time was spent working for pay on-campus and participating in co-curricular activities. Compared to Boise State freshmen, seniors spent more time preparing for class, working, and providing care for dependents. Freshmen spent more time than seniors on relaxing and socializing.

These trends were generally reflective of the larger national groups. Boise State freshmen, however, were much more likely to be working for pay off-campus than freshmen at other institutions. Seniors were more likely to be providing dependent care than the national sample. Both are again signs that Boise State students are more "non-traditional" than students at a majority of other institutions.

Table 1 provides a breakdown of time spent on the activities students reported as taking the most time in a week. Note that 53.5% of freshmen and 60% of seniors spent 15 hours or less preparing for class each week, while 46% of freshmen and 39% of seniors spent 15 hours or less working. The average time spent preparing for classes was 3.03 for freshmen and 3.39 for seniors (where a "3" was "11-15 hours" on the rating scale used). The average time spent on off-campus work was 3.72 for freshmen and 4.19 for seniors (where a "4" was "16-20 hours" on the rating scale used).

Table 1. Time Boise State Freshman and Seniors Spent Preparing for Class and Working Off-Campus

Hours spent per week	Percent of Time Spent preparing for Class		Percent of Time Spent working for pay off-campus	
	Freshmen	Seniors	Freshmen	Seniors
5 or fewer	14.0	10.3	36.2	29.7
6-10	32.5	26.7	3.6	3.4
11-15	21.0	23.0	6.1	5.9
16-20	14.0	14.4	10.2	9.3
21-25	9.0	1.9	13.8	12.7
26-30	6.5	6.2	9.7	9.3
more than 30	3.0	7.4	20.4	29.7
Mean response[1]	3.03	3.39	3.72	4.19

[1] On a 1-7 scale where 1=5 or fewer hours, 2=6-10 hours, 3=11-15 hours, 4=16-20 hours, 5=21-25 hours, 6=26-30 hours, and 7=more than 30 hours

Of course, time spent on various activities is related to the number of credits students are taking. In general, we would expect full-time students to spend more time preparing for class and participating in co-curricular activities and less time working and caring for children. Indeed, full-time students reported spending more time preparing for class (average of 3.36 vs. 2.88 for part-time students) and participating in co-curricular activities (average of 1.52 vs. 1.10 for part-timers). They spent less time working for pay off-campus (3.56 vs. 5.15 for part-timers) and providing care for dependents (2.22 vs. 3.95). Still, 39% of full-time and 50% of part-time students reported spending 10 hours or less per week on class preparation. And a surprising number of full-time students carried significant workloads—over 40% reported working more than 20 hours per week and 16.5% reported working more than 30 hours per week. Many part-time students may have had a reduced credit load because of their work hours—70% reported working more than 20 hours per week and 50% reported working more than 30 hours.

Level of Academic Participation

There are a variety of activities both within and outside the classroom that may indicate that students are academically engaged. Within the classroom, these include activities such as coming to class prepared, participating in class discussions, and working with other students on projects. Some beneficial out-of-class activities include working with faculty on projects, tutoring other students, and holding conversations with others about important topics. Table 2 displays the results for Boise State University freshmen and seniors.

Differences were found between freshmen and seniors on most of the items. The few that didn't show differences in mean responses are shaded on the table. In general, seniors were more likely to engage in the activity than were freshmen. One exception, however, was in re-writing papers where freshmen were more likely to re-write their papers then were seniors.

Boise State freshmen were most likely to engage in the following activities:

- Discuss ideas from reading or classes with others outside class
- Re-write a paper or assignment several times
- Work with other students on projects during class
- Ask questions in class or contribute to discussions
- Work harder than they thought they could to meet an instructor's standards or expectations

Seniors included some of the same activities as freshmen in their top five and added several others. Seniors were most likely to:

- ask questions in class or contribute to discussions
- discuss ideas from reading or classes with others outside class
- work with classmates outside of class to prepare assignments
- make a class presentation
- receive prompt feedback from faculty on their academic performance

Table 2. Level of Academic Participation for Boise State Freshmen and Seniors

Activity:	% Engaged in Activity		Average Response[2]	
	Freshmen	Seniors	Freshmen	Seniors
Asked questions in class or contributed to discussions	95.5	98.8	2.61	3.03
Used e-mail to communicate with an instructor or other students	66.7	83.1	2.05	2.34
Made a class presentation	67.0	95.0	1.93	2.60
Wrote a paper or assignment several times	85.6	72.3	2.66	2.11
Came to class unprepared	58.5	75.7	1.70	1.87
Worked with other students on projects during class	93.0	93.0	2.63	2.49
Worked with classmates outside of class to prepare assignments	72.1	93.4	2.04	2.65
Tutored or taught other students	37.8	53.3	1.47	1.70
Participated in a community-based project as part of a course	16.5	45.3	1.20	1.64
Used an electronic medium to discuss or complete assignment	41.5	68.2	1.64	2.03
Discussed grades or assignments with an instructor	88.1	96.7	2.38	2.55
Talked about career plans with a faculty member or advisor	65.7	80.7	1.96	2.10
Discussed ideas from reading or class with faculty outside of class	41.3	65.0	1.55	1.83
Received prompt feedback from faculty on your academic performance	81.1	92.6	2.31	2.56
Worked harder than you thought you could to meet an instructor's standards or expectations	83.5	90.5	2.46	2.49
Worked with a faculty member on a research project	17.5	26.3	1.22	1.37
Worked with faculty on activities other than coursework	12.5	31.3	1.17	1.41
Discussed ideas from your reading or classes with others outside class	94.5	98.8	2.72	2.97
Had serious conversations with students with very different beliefs, values, or opinions	80.1	85.6	2.42	2.38
Had serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity than your own	70.6	78.6	2.21	2.30

[2] where 1=never, 2=occasionally, 3=often, 4=very often

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Though their rankings were slightly different, both freshmen and seniors were least likely to:

- work with faculty on activities other than coursework
- participate in a community-based project as part of a regular course
- work with faculty on a research project
- tutor other students
- discuss ideas from reading or class with faculty outside of class

In general, Boise State student responses in this area were similar to those at other Master's I and II institutions and for the national group as a whole. The only activity that Boise State students were significantly less likely to engage in were in the use of e-mail to communicate with others or to complete assignments.

Reading and Writing Assignments

As another measure of academic engagement, students were asked to indicate the amount of reading and writing they had done during the current school year. Freshmen and seniors were most likely to indicate that they read between five and ten assigned books (about 40% selected this response) and between one and five books on their own (about 50% selected this response). Clearly, students spent more time on assigned books, as would be expected during an academic year. Responses from freshmen and seniors were similar in terms of reading.

Freshmen and senior responses differed more on writing assignments. While 71% of freshmen indicated they had written no papers or reports that exceeded 20 pages, only 48% of seniors said the same. Conversely, almost everyone (96% of freshmen, 98% of seniors) said that they had written papers or reports of less than 20 pages, with 25% of freshmen and 33% of seniors saying they had written five or more.

These responses were generally in line with what students at other institutions reported for reading and writing. Results indicated, however, that Boise State freshmen were more likely to be tested using mainly multiple-choice exams than were freshmen at other Master's level institutions. Boise State freshmen also reported taking more multiple-choice tests than did BSU seniors, probably due to the size of core course classes.

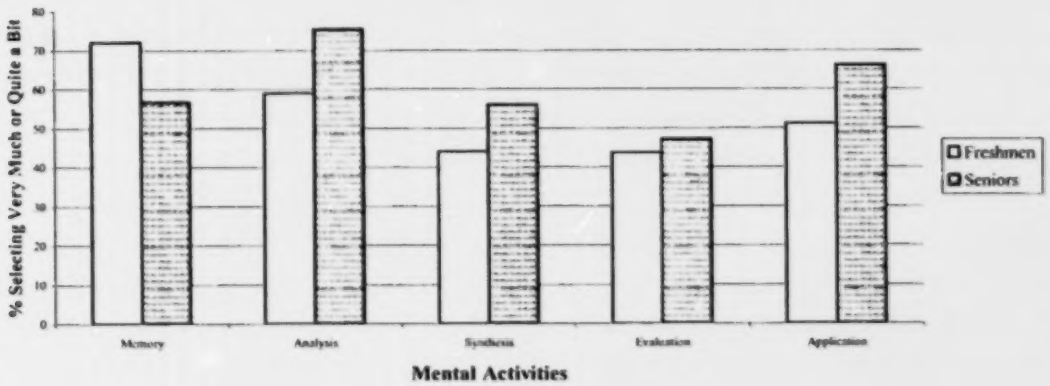
Character of Mental Activities

Cognitive activities can be placed on a continuum where memorization constitutes the simplest form of cognition, followed by application, analysis, synthesis, with evaluation (a judgment of value) being the most complex mental activity. On this survey, students were asked to indicate the extent to which their coursework emphasized the mental activities of memorizing facts, analyzing basic elements of an idea, synthesizing and organizing ideas or experience into new interpretations, making judgments about the value of information or arguments, and applying theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations. While BSU responses were similar to those nationally, locally freshmen and seniors differed from each other on the extent to which they undertook each form of cognition. Freshmen were most likely to engage in memorization, while seniors were most likely to engage in analysis, synthesis, and application of

theories. The groups did not differ in the extent their coursework emphasized making value judgments.

As shown by Figure 1, freshmen were most likely to engage in memorizing facts, ideas or methods so they could repeat them in pretty much the same form. Over 70% reported doing this

Figure 1. Freshmen and Senior Emphases on Mental Activities in Courses



quite a bit or very much in their courses. Seniors, on the other hand, were most likely to report engaging in analyzing the basic elements of an idea, experience or theory with approximately 75% reporting they engaged in this mental activity quite a bit or very much. Both groups were least likely to report that they engaged in making judgments about the value of information, arguments, or methods in their courses with less than half engaging in this activity quite a bit or very much. No real differences were found between Boise State students and those at other institutions.

Educational and Personal Growth

How much did Boise State contribute to students' educational and personal growth? In general, seniors would be expected to have grown more than freshmen in most, if not all, areas. Of the fourteen areas included on the survey, seniors had higher ratings on nine. The areas where differences did not occur are shaded in gray in the table below and include writing clearly, learning on your own, understanding yourself, understanding people of other backgrounds, and being honest and truthful.

Seniors indicated the college had contributed to their growth the most in:

- acquiring a broad general education
- thinking critically and analytically
- acquiring job skills
- writing clearly and effectively
- working effectively with others

Freshmen also indicated the college had contributed to their growth the most in acquiring a broad general education, thinking critically and analytically, and writing clearly and effectively. They added learning effectively on their own as an additional top growth area.

Both groups believed that the university contributed to their growth the least in the areas of voting in elections and contributing to the welfare of the community. There were no differences between Boise State responses and other institutions' responses that were large enough to merit comment.

Table 3. Boise State Contributions to Freshmen and Senior Growth

Growth Area:	College contributed very much or quite a bit		Average Response[3]	
	Freshmen	Seniors	Freshmen	Seniors
Acquiring a broad general education	64.8	76.5	2.82	3.12
Acquiring job or work-related knowledge and skills	36.7	65.3	2.28	2.95
Writing clearly and effectively	63.8	68.8	2.76	2.91
Speaking clearly and effectively	46.3	63.0	2.42	2.76
Thinking critically and analytically	60.8	77.8	2.77	3.12
Analyzing quantitative problems	38.4	57.3	2.29	2.69
Using computing and information technology	40.4	60.5	2.30	2.76
Working effectively with others	53.8	68.7	2.62	2.90
Voting in elections	6.5	10.5	1.35	1.56
Learning effectively on your own	59.3	61.2	2.70	2.80
Understanding yourself	50.5	56.6	2.58	2.63
Understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds	39.2	42.0	2.24	2.39
Being honest and truthful	44.2	43.1	2.39	2.34
Contributing to the welfare of your community	19.6	36.1	1.83	2.23

Opinions about the University

Students were asked about the extent to which their college emphasized spending significant amounts of time studying and on academic work, providing the support students needed to succeed academically, encouraging contact among students from other backgrounds, helping students cope with non-academic responsibilities, and providing the support needed to thrive socially. They were also asked about their relationships with other students, faculty members, and administrative personnel. In addition, a general rating of their educational experience was requested from students along with a question that asked if they would attend the same institution if starting over again.

[3] where 1=very little, 2=some, 3=quite a bit, 4=very much

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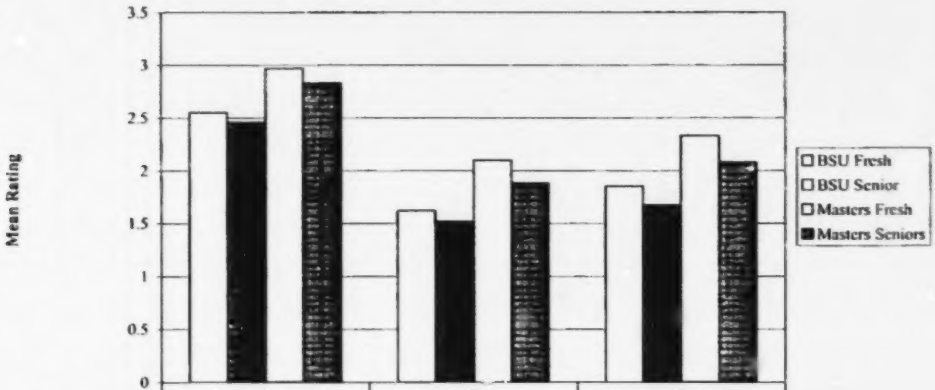
Many ratings in this area were lower for Boise State freshmen than for freshmen nationally. For Boise State freshmen, ratings were lower for three out of the five environmental areas (support needed to succeed, help to cope with non-academic responsibilities, and support needed to thrive socially). Boise State Senior ratings followed the same pattern, but the differences between the Boise State and national figures were not as pronounced, as shown by the figure below. BSU students thought the university was best at emphasizing the amounts of time needed for studying (a rating similar to others' nationally) and worst at providing help in coping with non-academic responsibilities (a rating lower than others' nationally). Ratings for BSU freshmen and seniors were similar except for perceptions of the institutional emphasis on providing the support needed to thrive socially, where seniors provided lower ratings than freshmen did.

Figure 2. Local and National Differences on Institutional Emphases



	1	2	3
BSU Fresh	2.55	1.62	1.85
BSU Senior	2.46	1.52	1.67
Masters Fresh	2.97	2.1	2.33
Masters Seniors	2.83	1.88	2.08

Emphasis Area

Emphasis area:

1= Providing the support you need to help you succeed
2= Helping you cope with your non-academic responsibilities (work, family, etc.)
3= Providing the support you need to thrive socially

Students were also asked to rate the quality of their relationships with other students, with faculty members, and with administrative personnel and offices. Boise State students rated the quality of their relationships with other students the highest and relationships with administration the lowest. Though freshmen and senior ratings were similar for relationships with other students and with administrative personnel, senior ratings for quality of relationships with faculty were higher than were freshmen ratings. In terms of national comparisons, Boise State freshmen ratings of the quality of their relationships with administrative personnel and offices were significantly lower than other institutions' ratings in this area.

The less-than-positive perceptions of the administration by Boise State students probably influenced the ratings of general satisfaction where students were asked to evaluate their entire

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educational experience at the institution. Mean ratings assessing the educational experience were below the national average for both BSU freshmen and seniors. Still, 67% of BSU freshmen and 74% of seniors gave either "good" or "excellent" ratings to their overall educational experience. In addition, about 75% of both freshmen and seniors said that they would either probably or definitely go to Boise State again if they were starting over, figures which were similar to those nationally.

Engagement Index and Benchmarks

In addition to the item-by-item results, participants in the NSSE survey were provided with a set of benchmarks in five areas that used a combination of items from the survey. The benchmarks were: level of academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student interactions with faculty members, enriching educational experiences, and supportive campus environment. Each benchmark was created on a 100-point scale. To control for differences in institutional characteristics, predicted benchmark scores were also developed based on a set of institutional characteristics[4]. Where the actual scores were higher than the predicted scores, this indicated that students are more engaged in the respective educational practice (and likely benefiting more) than might be expected. Where the actual scores were lower than the predicted, this indicated that students may be doing less than expected.

Level of Academic Challenge

The first benchmark, Level of Academic Challenge, was based on these items:

- time preparing for class
- number of assigned books
- number of written papers of fewer than 20 pages
- number of written papers of 20 pages or more
- coursework emphasizes analysis
- coursework emphasizes synthesizing and organizing ideas
- coursework emphasizes marking judgments about the value of information
- coursework emphasizes applying theory or concepts
- worked harder than you thought you could to meet expectations
- campus environment emphasizes spending significant amounts of time studying and on academic work

As shown by Figure 3 below, Boise State had benchmark scores that were lower than other Master's level institutions (as well as the entire national sample) at both the freshman and senior levels. The freshmen benchmark fell at the 8th percentile while the senior benchmark fell at the 14th percentile compared to other master's level institutions.

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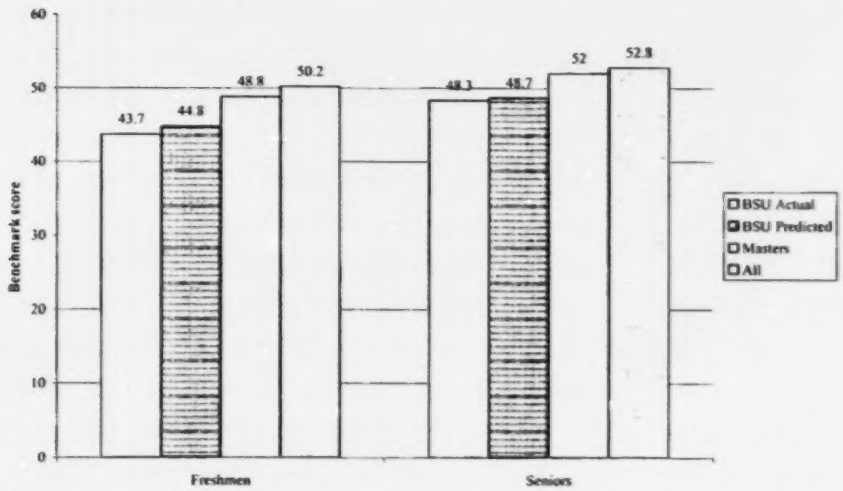
[4] These included: (a) public/private, (b) admission selectivity from *Barron's* 1999, (c) undergraduate enrollment, (d) urbanicity, (e) percentage full-time, (f) sex, (g) racial/ethnic composition, (h) educational and general expenses per student from 1995-96 IPEDS, (i) endowment or assets per student from 1995-96 IPEDS, (j) student's reported major field, (k) student-reported age, (l) percentage of students who completed the survey via the web.

Including information on institutional characteristics changed Boise State's benchmarks very little, an indication that type of institution had little to do with level of academic challenge.

Figure 3. Level of Academic Challenge Benchmarks



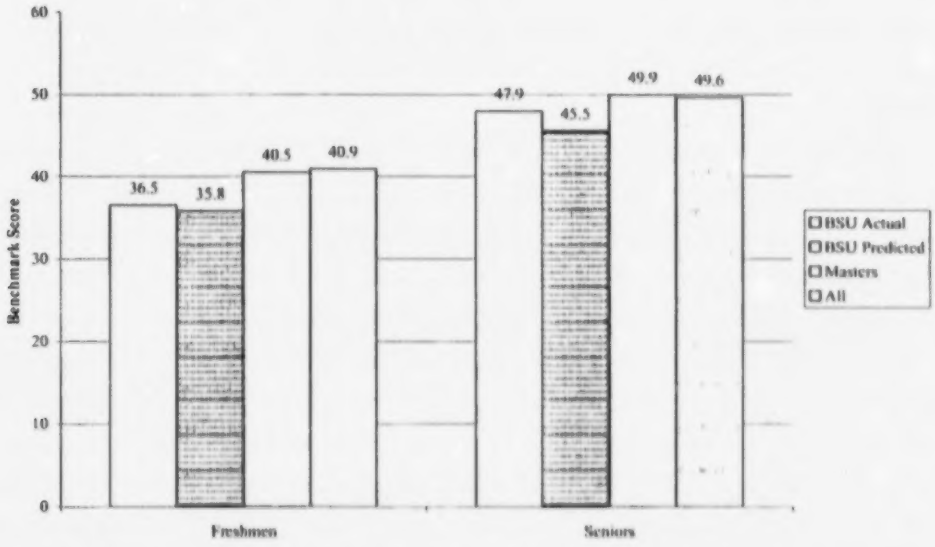
Active and Collaborative Learning

There were seven items that were used to develop the benchmark on active and collaborative learning. They were:

- asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions
- made a class presentation
- worked with other students on projects during class
- worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments
- tutored or taught other students
- participated in a community-based project as part of a regular course
- discussed ideas from your reading or classes with others outside of class

As shown in Figure 4 below, Boise State students scored somewhat lower on this benchmark than students at other Master's level institutions. The difference between responses of our freshmen and our seniors was particularly marked—more than11 points on this benchmark and the only benchmark where statistically significant differences were found between Boise State freshmen and seniors. This indicates that our seniors reported significantly more opportunities

Figure 4. Active and Collaborative Learning Benchmarks



for active and collaborative learning than our freshmen did. However, this trend was also evident nationally, a sign that more active and collaborative learning opportunities generally are available at the upper division. Still the freshman benchmark fell at the 16th percentile and the senior benchmark fell at the 31st percentile compared to other master's level institutions.

As shown in Figure 4, the predicted benchmarks for Boise State were lower than the original benchmarks that did not account for institutional characteristics. This indicates that for the type of institution that Boise State is, students are experiencing more active and collaborative learning than might be expected, especially at the senior level.

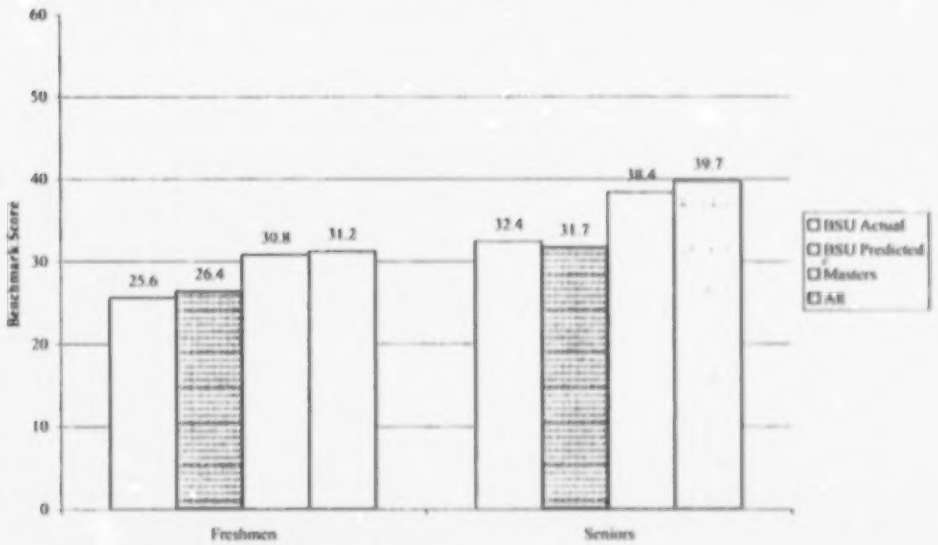
Student Interactions with Faculty Members

Six items were used to calculate the benchmark for student-faculty interactions. They were:

- discussed grades or assignments with an instructor
- talked about career plans with a faculty member or advisor
- discussed ideas from readings or classes with faculty members outside of class
- worked with faculty members on activities other than coursework
- received prompt feedback from faculty on academic performance
- worked with a faculty member on a research project

Responses were lower for Boise State freshmen and seniors than the national group, with seniors somewhat more likely to have interactions with faculty than freshmen. This is shown in Figure 5 below. Both the freshman and senior benchmarks were at the 12th percentile compared to other master's level institutions. Accounting for institutional characteristics changed the Boise State benchmarks very little. The freshman benchmark was slightly lower than expected, while the senior benchmark was slightly higher than expected.

Figure 5. Student Interactions with Faculty Benchmark



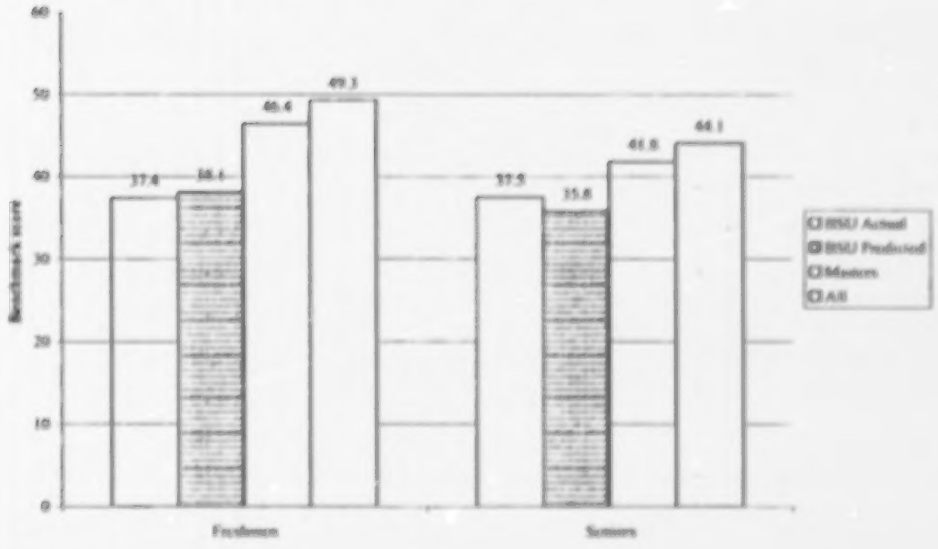
Enriching Educational Experiences

The enriching educational experiences benchmark consisted of ten items. They were:

- participating in co-curricular activities
- practicum, internship, field experience or clinical assignment
- community service or volunteer work
- foreign language coursework and study abroad
- independent study or self-designed major
- culminating senior experience
- had serious conversations with students with religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values very different from yours
- had serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity than your own
- used an electronic medium (e-mail, list-serve, chat group, etc.) to discuss or complete an assignment
- campus environment encourages contact among students from different economic, social and racial or ethnic backgrounds

Boise State freshmen and seniors had almost identical scores on this benchmark (see Figure 6). Again, they were lower than either master's institutions or for the total NSSE group participating in the study. In particular, Boise State freshmen were significantly lower on this benchmark than their peers at other institutions, marking this as an area for concerted work.

Figure 6. Enriching Educational Experiences Benchmarks



This was shown by the 5th percentile ranking for freshmen on this benchmark compared to other master's level institutions. The senior benchmark was at the 18th percentile. Adding information about institutional characteristics to predict new benchmarks resulted in very little change. The freshman benchmark was only slightly lower than predicted while the senior benchmark was slightly better than predicted.

Supportive Campus Environment

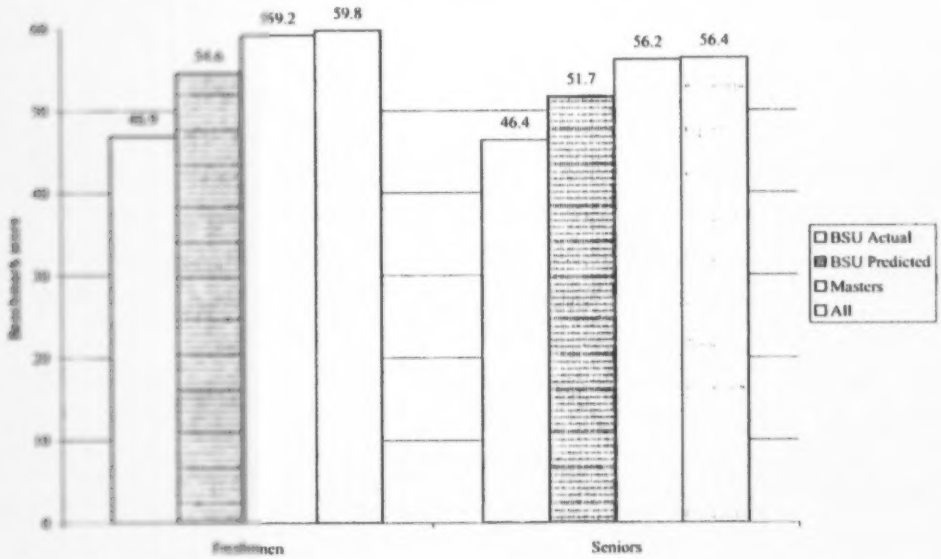
The last benchmark was a combination of six items:

- campus environment emphasizes providing the support you need to help you succeed academically
- campus environment emphasizes helping you cope with your non-academic responsibilities
- campus environment emphasizes providing the support you need to thrive socially
- quality of relationships with other students
- quality of relationships with faculty members
- quality of relationships with administrative personnel

No real difference was found between Boise State freshmen and seniors on this benchmark. However, both groups were significantly below the national norms (see Figure 7). This benchmark showed the largest gap between Boise State and other institutions of any of the five benchmarks. The freshman benchmark fell at the 1st percentile while the senior benchmark fell at the 4th percentile compared to other Master's level institutions.

In addition, the actual benchmark scores for BSU freshmen and seniors were both decidedly

Figure 7. Supportive Campus Environment Benchmarks



lower than the predicted scores, indicating that a more supportive campus environment would have been expected based on the characteristics of our institution. The differences were especially marked for freshmen.

Summary and Conclusions

The purpose of this survey was the provide insight into the extent that students were engaging in activities that were related to enhanced learning and personal development. On the survey, students rated their level of participation in a variety of in-class and out-of-class activities; estimated the number of hours spent on things such as classroom preparation and work; told about the amount of reading and writing they did and types of examinations they took; and rated the extent to which their classes required mental activities such as memorization, evaluation, and synthesis. In addition, students indicated how much the university had helped them grow in a variety of outcome areas. They rated their perceptions of the university and their relationships with other students, faculty, and administrative personnel and also provided an overall rating of the university.

Boise State freshmen and seniors both estimated that they spent the most time per week working for pay at a job off-campus. In second place was time spent preparing for class, with over half of students reporting they spent 15 hours or less per week. Many faculty have thought that jobs took more time than classes for students, and this survey confirms that belief. Freshmen spent about as much time relaxing and socializing as they spent preparing for classes, but seniors spent less (perhaps that's how they became seniors). Whether a student was full- or part-time was related to the number of hours spent in preparing for class, working off-campus, participating in co-curricular activities, and caring for children. Still, a surprising number of full-time students spent little time on studying and much time on working. However, the pattern of how Boise State students spend their time was similar to that for students nationally, except that our freshmen spent more time working and our seniors spent more time caring for children than students at other institutions.

There are many ways to define whether a student is academically engaged. The top ways that Boise State students indicated that they were academically engaged were the percentage who indicated they were contributing in class and discussing ideas from reading or classes with others outside class. Other ways were working on projects in class (freshmen) or outside class (seniors), re-writing papers (freshmen), and making class presentations (seniors). Students reported that they were least likely to interact with faculty outside the classroom, work on community-based projects, or tutor other students.

The activity of writing seemed to be occurring throughout the institution. Almost everyone, whether a Boise State freshman or a senior, reported writing at least one short paper of less than 20 pages during the academic year. Longer papers of more than 20 pages were typically written by seniors, with over half reporting they had completed at least one such an assignment within the year. Freshmen were more likely to revise their papers, perhaps because they were still in English 101 or 102 courses.

Memorization of facts was the chief mental activity of our freshmen, perhaps because freshmen mainly take core courses, and this is the format for many introductory courses. As a corollary, BSU freshmen also reported taking more multiple-choice tests compared to BSU seniors or freshmen at other institutions. Our seniors, on the other hand, were most likely to report that they were engaging in analysis in their classes.

In terms of outcomes, results showed that Boise State seniors usually felt that the university had contributed to their growth more than freshmen. Hopefully, this was due to the greater number of credits that seniors have completed. There were no differences between seniors and freshmen on the extent they thought the university had contributed to their growth in writing, learning on their own, understanding yourself and people of other backgrounds, and being honest and truthful. Seniors thought that Boise State had contributed to their growth most in acquiring a broad general education, thinking critically and analytically, acquiring job skills, writing clearly and effectively, and working effectively with others. Freshmen also saw some early gains from attending Boise State, especially in the areas of acquiring a broad general education, writing clearly and effectively, thinking critically, and learning effectively on their own.

Boise State students (especially freshmen) had significantly lower responses than national ratings on the part of the survey where students were asked to rate institutional support and relationships. Compared to others nationally, our freshmen thought that the institution provided less emphasis on support needed to succeed, help in coping with non-academic responsibilities, and support needed to thrive socially. Freshmen also rated their relationships with administrative personnel lower than freshmen at other institutions. Both freshmen and seniors had lower general satisfaction ratings than other students had. Despite these lower benchmark scores, about 75% of both freshmen and seniors indicated they would probably or definitely go to Boise State again if they were starting over. These figures are in line with the national data provided and indicate that a majority of students are satisfied with their educational experiences at Boise State.

On five benchmarks of institutional engagement—level of academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student interactions with faculty members, enriching educational experiences, and supportive campus environment—Boise State consistently had scores that were quite a bit lower than other Master's level institutions. Freshmen benchmarks were particularly low. Compared to other Master's level institutions, Boise State had freshmen benchmarks at the 1st percentile for supportive campus environment, the 5th percentile for enriching educational experiences, and the 8th percentile for level of academic challenge. Boise State had its highest benchmarks in the area of active and collaborative learning—16th percentile for the freshmen and 31st percentile for the senior benchmark. At the 4th percentile, supportive campus environment was also the weakest senior benchmark.

Generally, taking institutional characteristics into consideration changed the benchmarks very little. The one exception was for the supportive campus benchmark, which indicated that Boise State fell well below what would be expected for a campus with our characteristics.

When combined with the evidence of the lowest benchmark scores for both BSU freshmen and seniors in this area, we must conclude that campus support certainly is an area in need of further attention. Perhaps the multiple priorities of school, home, and work that pull on so many of our students also cause them to wish for more support from the university. Perhaps the university lacks supports what today's students need. Whatever the reason, there is obviously a "disconnect" between all of our orientation and advising activities and student perceptions of institutional support. Continued efforts to integrate student affairs and academic affairs activities may improve this situation.

The benchmark scores also indicate that despite recent efforts, Boise State still has additional room for improvement in a variety of areas. Boise State retention studies have shown that interactions with faculty outside the classroom are an important predictor of retention, so scores at the 12th percentile on the Student Interactions with Faculty benchmark are a concern. Initiatives such as the Undergraduate Research Initiative and department-based social and intellectual activities should be encouraged and nurtured further. The data also support a focus on continued improvement and enlargement of service learning and continued excellence in our internship programs as a way to improve the Enriching Educational Experiences benchmark.. Note, however, that the goal is to improve the environment for student learning, not simply the benchmarks themselves, which serve as proxies for environmental characteristics.

While answering a number of important questions about Boise State and its students, the survey results also raise another entire set of questions. One pressing question is "What activities are related to the greatest perceived gains in learning and satisfaction for Boise State students?" We know that our students are involved in work and family to a greater extent than students at many other institutions. Surely this also has an impact on engagement and satisfaction. Some things, such as time needed for work and families, Boise State can do little about. Other things such as faculty contact, internship experiences, and service-learning can be better controlled by the institution. It is important to know what things under institutional control should be improved first to improve student learning and satisfaction. These questions will be explored in a follow-up research report dealing solely with our student data.

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